



Mobile-Assisted Language Learning through Interaction Applications: Analysis and Evaluation

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Mobile-Assisted Language Learning through Interaction Applications: Analysis and Evaluation

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Abstract

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has become an integral component of contemporary language education, leveraging the ubiquity of mobile technologies to facilitate interactive learning beyond traditional settings. This study critically analyzes and classifies free, texting-based interaction applications, specifically HelloTalk and Linguado, assessing their features, pedagogical effectiveness, and user experiences through a mixed-methods design. Data were collected from twelve adult learners using judgmental evaluations, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Results demonstrate that HelloTalk exhibits superior feature diversity, user engagement, and facilitation of cultural exchange compared to Linguado, positioning it as more effective for intermediate language learners. Nonetheless, both applications present challenges concerning user safety, technical stability, and informal learning constraints. The study contextualizes these findings within constructivist and communicative language teaching frameworks, underscoring the potential of interaction applications to enhance communicative competence and intercultural understanding. Recommendations include advancing user safety protocols and integrating sophisticated interactive elements such as AI-driven chatbots to augment pedagogical value. This research addresses critical gaps in MALL application evaluation, particularly for adult learners and non-English languages, contributing valuable insights for educators, developers, and policymakers in digital language education.

Keywords: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning; Interaction Applications; HelloTalk; Linguado; Language Learning; Constructivism; Digital Learning Tools

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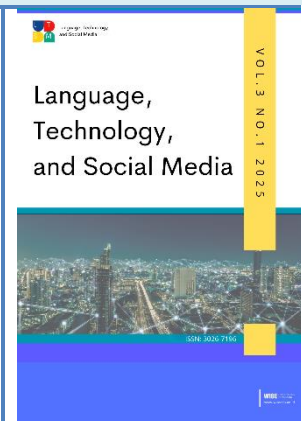
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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly transformed various fields, including education. One notable development is Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which integrates Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) with mobile learning. MALL leverages the widespread availability of mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets with wireless connectivity, making it a pervasive element in modern life [1], [2].

Previous research has largely concentrated on the effectiveness of MALL in improving core language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary acquisition [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]. However, the interactive dimension of language learning an essential factor for achieving linguistic proficiency remains insufficiently explored [8], [9], [10]. While some studies, such as those by Rosell-Aguilar [2], have acknowledged interactive applications within the MALL context and CALL frameworks [11], systematic evaluations and comparative analyses of these tools are limited. For instance, Nushi and Arifin et al. [12] offer insights into the strengths and limitations of the HelloTalk application, yet their study lacks a comprehensive methodological framework and comparison with alternative platforms. Additionally, the majority of MALL studies focus on English as a second or foreign language [3], [4], [13], [14], [15], creating a significant gap in research addressing other languages. Research specifically targeting adult learners is also scarce, emphasizing the need for more focused investigations within this demographic [13].

This study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing and categorizing free interactive applications based on their features. It evaluates and compares two prominent applications, HelloTalk and Linguado, utilizing both judgmental and empirical approaches. These applications facilitate language learning across multiple languages, extending beyond the traditional English-centric focus. The evaluation employs frameworks developed by McMurry et al. [1] and criteria proposed by Rosell-Aguilar [2]. Furthermore, the study examines theoretical foundations underpinning texting-based interactive applications and assesses their advantages and limitations from users' perspectives, ultimately offering practical recommendations to enhance their pedagogical effectiveness.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive evaluation and comparative analysis of interaction applications. Unlike prior studies that tend to focus on single applications or specific language skills, this research adopts a broader scope, encompassing diverse linguistic contexts and adult learners' needs. This approach not only addresses critical gaps in the literature but also provides valuable insights into the potential of these applications to foster effective communication and intercultural competence.

Research Question (RQ)

The study questions guiding this investigation are as follows:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses in utilizing interaction applications for effective MALL?
2. Which of the two interaction applications, HelloTalk or Linguado, has better characteristics?
3. Which learning theories are most relevant to interaction applications?
4. What changes could be made to interaction applications?

METHODS

Participants

Twelve Greek adult learners of foreign languages participated in this study (N = 12). Among them, 75% were female and 25% were male. The majority of participants (67%) were aged between 18 and 26 years, while the remaining 33% were between 31 and 40 years old. All participants were studying various foreign languages. When asked about prior experience with interaction applications, most participants reported no previous use. The same participants were invited for follow-up interviews, with five expressing interest (N = 5), representing 42% of the total sample. Of these interviewees, 80% were female (N = 4) and 20% were male (N = 1). Most interviewees reported engaging in conversations with native speakers despite difficulties, except participant L4, who did not interact with anyone on HelloTalk.

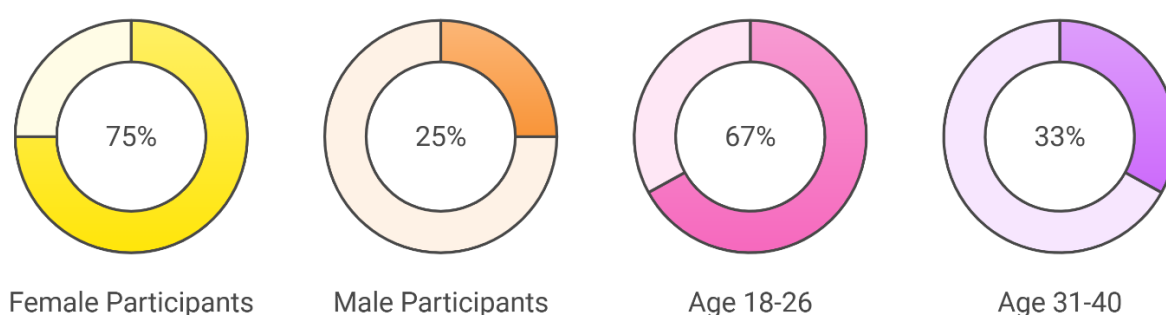


Figure 1. Demographic and participation breakdown of study participants

Software-Classification and Selection

Two interaction applications from Google Play were selected for this study. Google Play has a more vast education category of applications [16], [17]. Moreover, Wajid et al. [18] supports that iOS apps are almost overlapped with Android ones. For the collection of the interaction applications, the keywords “interaction”, “language exchange” and “language practice” were entered to start a query on interaction applications. Hundreds of applications appeared in the results of the queries along with other suggestions. After downloading and scanning through the results, 25 apps were suitable since this study classifies interaction applications that are not paid or tutor-driven and that focus on language learning. However, at that point, it is pertinent to select appropriate apps that are distinguished from those applications that aim at dating, meeting new friends and socializing. The selected applications are goal-oriented and are placed under the education category on Google Play. This study’s classification of interaction applications follows the scheme implied by Rosell-Aguilar [2] in the definition of interaction applications, but with a few alterations (see Figure 2). Instead of three categories, the applications are classified into four groups. The text interaction category is divided into forum and texting-based interaction groups, the voice interaction category is renamed as an audio-based interaction group and finally the video interaction category is renamed as a streaming/vlogging interaction group. Some of the applications can be put into more than one group, because they have many different features such as *LangNet-Talk*, *Chat & learn Languages together* or *SpeakNative - Practice & Learn* (see Appendix C). However, for the purposes of this study, the apps were placed under the four groups based on their most salient features.

Forum Interaction (answering or correcting)	Texting-based Interaction	Audio-based Interaction	Streaming / Vlogging Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HiNative-Learn Languages • LangNet-Talk, Chat & learn Languages together • Yask - A new way to learn languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HelloTalk- Learn Languages • Speaky-Language Exchange • Idyoma: Local Language Exchange • Linguado - Language Learning Community • Speak Out - English Speaking Practice • HiNatives - App for language learning • Gangla-Language Exchange with Native Speaker • English Chat - Chat to learn English • English chat only • SLX - Chat to Learn English • Speaky World - Chat & Learn Languages for Free • fylp - Language Exchange • SewaYou - Real-Life Japanese Language Exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact! - Practice Speaking English &more • Hilokal - language exchange learn Korean English • Lingbe: Practice Languages • IELTS SPEAKING: Speak To Stranger In English • Engle: English Talking app, Speak English Online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hallo: Speak English • SpeakNative - Practice & Learn • Chatterbug: Language Learning • Hibeel - Language Practice

Figure 2. Classification of Free Interaction Applications

From the four categories of free interaction applications, one category was considered suitable to examine. The texting-based interaction applications' category was chosen due to its vast number of applications compared to the other categories, which adds to its prominence. For the selection of the two texting-based interaction applications, certain criteria were put into practice: 1) The rating of the apps on Google Play should be at least near four stars; 2) The downloads on Google Play should be at least 500 thousand; 3) The applications should be found both on Google Play and App Store; 4) The apps should be downloaded freely into user's smartphones/tablets; 5) You can practice multiple languages and not only one specific; 6) The features of the apps (see [Appendix C](#)); 7) Most of the features of the apps must be free, allowing little space for premium versions. Based on these criteria, the interaction applications that were selected are (1) HelloTalk-Learn Languages and (2) Linguado - Language Learning Community. A detailed description of the two interaction applications, using Hubbard's [19] presentation schemes with seven subcategories can be seen in [Appendix A](#).

Procedure

The methodology followed for the MALL evaluation of HelloTalk and Linguado is based on the methodological framework undertaken by McMurphy et al. [1] for CALL (see [Appendix D](#))

Judgemental Evaluation

The judgmental evaluation was conducted by the researcher/evaluator to determine which of the two interaction applications, HelloTalk and Linguado, possesses superior characteristics, addressing Research Question 2 (RQ2). This evaluation focused on the applications' features without involving actual communication with interlocutors. The judgmental evaluation preceded

the empirical evaluation carried out by the participants and was completed using a checklist. The checklist employed a five-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree).

The criteria emphasized not only technical features but also broader evaluative aspects based primarily on Rosell-Aguilar's framework [2], with adjustments to suit the study's context. These criteria were similarly adapted for the participants' checklist to enable a coherent comparison. Consequently, the evaluations and analyses from both the researcher and participants are presented jointly. Finally, the evaluator provided an overall rating for each application using a five-star scale, ranging from one star (☆ = I dislike it) to five stars (☆☆☆☆☆ = I like it).

Questionnaire: Empirical Evaluation and Use Experience

The empirical evaluation through the questionnaire aims at finding which of the two interaction applications, HelloTalk or Linguado, has better characteristics through checklists according to the participants and compare them (RQ2) after their using them. Questionnaires are also used in order to find the views of participants about use experience and possible alterations to the apps (RQ4). At this point, it should be noted that the questionnaire was distributed to the participants through Google Forms for the collection of empirical data (see Appendix H). The procedure that was followed before the distribution of the questionnaire involved an informed consent, which was sent to them through Google Forms. It was in Greek as the participants' native language is Greek and it is a shared language by every participant which they could understand. The content of both the Greek and English informed consent can be seen in Appendix G.

After submitting the informed consent, the participants were contacted via email. They were asked to use HelloTalk and Linguado for five days each around Christmas and New Year's Eve, for at least ten minutes daily, and to explore the possibilities of the apps by participating in a language exchange with other interlocutors. The time period was chosen, because many studies state that students have less time for MALL outside of class during course weeks and are more active during holidays [20], [21], [22], [23]. They were also asked to choose a language in which they were not total beginners and were given the links to each interaction application. The suggestion about levels was given due to the fact that advanced learners appreciate more communication, reading and listening than beginners who focus mainly on grammar [24], [25]. After the ten-day period, they were sent the questionnaire through Google Forms in Greek (see Appendix H), because it is their mother tongue and that increases the quality of the data in questionnaires [20].

The analysis of the questionnaire is both quantitative and qualitative. After the collection of the answers, the data were transferred to a certain software for analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used and the data were imported to it. Descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative analysis of the data, as the sample was small. In particular, the mean scores and standard deviations of questions were used for the comparison of the scores assigned by the studyer. For questions, a qualitative analysis was done mainly with the addition of percentages for the multiple choice questions (see Appendix B). The answers in the open-ended questions were categorized and presented holistically.

Interviews: Qualitative Analysis

Follow-up interviews for qualitative analysis and triangulation were conducted for the purposes of this study. The role of interviews was vital in the study design of this study. Some of the areas of the study questions of this study required an in-depth exploration and further clarification (RQ1, 2, 4). All the interviews have been recorded on the studyer's mobile, after obtaining the interviewees' permission, and they were ensured about the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers (see Informed Consent in [Appendix G](#)). The interviews were conducted in Greek in order to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Greek was also the first language of the interviewees that allowed them to express themselves in a more effective way. The interviews were conducted via ZOOM that is an online chat software and took place on appointed and arranged dates. Similar questions were asked to every respondent and every interview lasted around 15 minutes.

The interviews are semi-structured, as questions were prepared in advance without neglecting any significant ones [26]. Ten fixed questions were designed in order to serve the purposes of the interview, which can be found in [Appendix I](#) in both Greek and English. In the interview sessions, some questions that were included in the questionnaire were posed as well so as to uncover certain issues that may not have emerged in the questionnaire. It is evident that the interview gives the chance to the interviewee to elaborate on a particular answer. From the six types of interview questions proposed by Patton [27], the fixed questions that are presented in [Appendix I](#) involved three types: background/demographic, feeling and opinion/beliefs/values questions. Improvisation questions were asked as well during the flow of the conversations.

The semi-structured interviews were qualitatively analysed based on the adapted four-step process of preparation for analysis, of analysis, of synthesis, and of presentation and interpretation proposed by Hamilton and Finley [28]. In the first step, the interview data were transcribed in order to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative action study that are presented in [Appendix J](#). They were organized into files in the computer with coding for each interviewee (L1 to L5) in order to ensure their anonymity and the studyer immersed in them. In the second step, the predetermined categories and themes within each category were identified and quotes that illustrate their essence were selected. In the third step, patterns were identified in the data by finding relationships among categories, findings were formulated and supported with evidence from the data. In the fourth step, the analysis process was reported with the findings in categories. The findings and their meaning were also reported. The categories that were identified are: 1) Interviewees' views on the strengths and weaknesses of interaction applications; 2) The interviewees' preferences for HelloTalk or Linguado; 3) Interviewees' views on using interaction applications to practice languages; 4) Possible alterations for improving interaction applications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation of HelloTalk Learn Languages and Linguado Language Learning Community is provided and compared according to the scores assigned by the evaluator and the participants from the questionnaire (see Section 3 and 4 in [Appendix H](#)). The evaluation is divided into four categories of similar criteria for the judgmental and empirical evaluation (see [Tables 2, 3, 4, 5](#)). A total rating of two applications is provided by the participants with answers to further questions about use experience (see [Table 6](#)). A total rating of the two interaction apps is also provided by the evaluator as part of the judgmental evaluation, which is presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Evaluator's Total Rating of the Two Interaction Applications

Application	Rating
HelloTalk – Learn Languages	★★★★☆ (4)
Linguado – Language Learning Community	★★★☆☆ (3)

Table 2. Evaluation of Two Interaction Applications by the Evaluator (E) and Participants (P) Based on Language Learning Criteria

Criterion	HelloTalk – Learn Languages			Linguado – Language Learning Community		
	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD
Listening Practice	5	2.66 (Q8)	1.23	4	2.25 (Q42)	1.13
Speaking Practice	5	2.58 (Q9)	1.16	4	2.50 (Q43)	1.16
Reading Practice	4	3.58 (Q10)	1.44	3	3.41 (Q44)	1.24
Writing Practice	5	3.33 (Q11)	1.61	4	3.58 (Q45)	1.37
Grammar through Conversations	5	3.16 (Q12)	1.26	4	3.25 (Q46)	.965
Grammar through Activities	4	2.83 (Q13)	1.19	1	2.91 (Q47)	1.16
Vocabulary through Conversations	4	3.50 (Q14)	1.62	4	3.41 (Q48)	1.16
Vocabulary through Activities	4	4.08 (Q15)	1.08	4	3.00 (Q49)	1.41
Pronunciation	3	2.41 (Q16)	1.16	3	2.25 (Q50)	1.21
Cultural Information	5	2.91 (Q17)	1.37	4	3.08 (Q51)	1.24

Note. The letter E stands for the evaluator, P for participants, Q for questions found in the questionnaire and SD for standard deviation.

Table 3. Evaluation of Two Interaction Applications by the Evaluator (E) and Participants (P) Based on Pedagogical Criteria

	HelloTalk – Learn Languages			Linguado – Language Learning Community		
	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD
Control of Language Level	4	3.08 (Q18)	.996	2	2.50 (Q52)	1.08
Teaching (Presentation, Explanation and Examples)	4	3.41 (Q19)	1.24	3	2.25 (Q53)	1.28
Focus on Translation	4	2.91 (Q20)	.996	4	2.75 (Q54)	1.42
Differentiation/ Adaptability	3	3.16 (Q21)	1.26	3	2.83 (Q55)	1.46
Content Errors/Omissions	2	2.75 (Q22)	1.21	2	2.66 (Q56)	1.23
Engagement	4	4.08 (Q23)	1.16	2	2.66 (Q57)	1.23

Note. The letter E stands for the evaluator, P for participants, Q for questions found in the questionnaire and SD for standard deviation.

Table 4. Evaluation of Two Interaction Applications by the Evaluator (E) and Participants (P) Based on User Experience Criteria

	<i>HelloTalk – Learn Languages</i>			<i>Linguado – Language Learning Community</i>		
	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD
Mutual Explanation of Expressions	-	2.83 (Q24)	1.26	-	2.83 (Q58)	1.26
Mutual Correction of Mistakes	-	2.91 (Q25)	1.24	-	2.83 (Q59)	1.19
Mutual Translation of Expressions	-	2.66 (Q26)	1.43	-	2.75 (Q60)	1.35
Mutual Media Exchange (Sharing)	-	2.41 (Q27)	1.31	-	2.41 (Q61)	.900
Problem with Registration and Installation	4	1.58 (Q28)	1.16	2	1.50 (Q62)	.904
Distraction of Adds (Advertising)	4	2.00 (Q29)	.953	1	2.00 (Q63)	1.27
Cooperation with Other Interlocutors	-	3.25 (Q30)	1.28	-	3.16 (Q64)	1.19
Predicament (Felt Uncomfortable)	-	2.50 (Q31)	1.31	-	3.00 (Q65)	1.20
Safety Sharing Personal Information	1	1.75 (Q32)	.866	1	1.83 (Q66)	1.02

Note. The letter E stands for the evaluator, P for participants, Q for questions found in the questionnaire and SD for standard deviation.

Table 5. Evaluation of Two Interaction Applications by the Evaluator (E) and Participants (P) Based on Technological Criteria

	<i>HelloTalk – Learn Languages</i>			<i>Linguado – Language Learning Community</i>		
	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD	E's Score	Ps' Mean	Ps' SD
Legible Environment (Interface)	2	4.08 (Q33)	1.16	5	3.58 (Q67)	1.16
User Friendly (Navigation)	3	3.83 (Q34)	1.46	5	3.33 (Q68)	1.43
Importance of Instructions for Use	5	4.00 (Q35)	1.12	4	4.25 (Q69)	.621
Freezing (Stability)	1	1.33 (Q36)	.492	1	1.66 (Q70)	.651
Functionality of Features	1	3.58 (Q37)	1.08	5	3.16 (Q71)	1.26
Gamification	5	3.50 (Q38)	1.00	4	2.25 (Q72)	1.13
Importance of Progress Indicators	4	3.91 (Q39)	.900	4	3.66 (Q73)	.778
Electronic Skills Practice	4	3.33 (Q40)	1.23	4	2.91 (Q74)	1.16

Map's Support in Finding Interlocutors	2	3.83 (Q41)	1.40	4	3.41 (Q75)	1.50
Support (Help Section)	2	-	-	4	-	-
Offline Work	1	-	-	1	-	-
Exploration of Computer Potential	5	-	-	5	-	-

Note. The letter E stands for the evaluator, P for participants, Q for questions found in the questionnaire and SD for standard deviation.

For section 5 of the questionnaire (see [Appedix B](#) and [H](#)), a quantitative analysis with percentages and a qualitative analysis with grouping of open-ended questions follows. Most of the participants (N=10) spared a few minutes on the use of the applications. Only one used them for 10 minutes sharp and only one used them for approximately half an hour. On the whole, participants followed the suggested timeframe and only one was motivated enough to use them for more than ten minutes. This might be due to the fact that most adults have busy schedules. In section 5 of the questionnaire, participants were also asked to state which languages they opted to practice for each application. Most of the participants (N=10) practiced the same language they were learning at that particular time. Two participants ([L2](#) and [L4](#) of the interviews) practiced a different language on HelloTalk (German and Russian accordingly) and English on Linguado.

Only 25% of the participants responded to question (Q80) about adding more features to interaction applications. They suggested adding reading instructions, more exercises in terms of grammar and vocabulary etc., providing a better matching of users according to their target language and interests and the opportunity to practice a language not directly through conversations, but through exercises in which other interlocutors would participate. 83% of the participants would use interaction applications again for different reasons. Most of them agreed that the apps help them meet new people and the apps are interesting and helpful by promoting language learning, especially colloquial speech. They would also use them again, because they can talk to native speakers and in their opinion this is the best way to learn a language. However, other participants (N=2) would not like to use them again for other reasons. One claimed that formal language learning from tutors would provide them with more enriched and targeted knowledge. Another one claimed that they simply did not like interaction applications.

A great majority of participants (N=9) preferred HelloTalk to Linguado, because they considered it more interesting, with more features and with more extra material. Other reasons are because it was familiar, pleasurable and organized in terms of structure, it sent more notifications, participants felt safer using it and consider the user profiles there more credible, they did not like showing their whereabouts on Linguado in which they were spammed by its users, meaning they were not able to reply to everyone. Only one participant would like to use Linguado again due to its interface (Q84). 17% of the participants would not want to use any of them again, because they did not understand their function and they did not like speaking to strangers (Q84). In [Table 6](#), the total ratings of the two interaction applications by the participants are shown. It is evident that HelloTalk is better than Linguado according to them.

Table 6. Participants' Total Rating of the Two Interaction Applications

Application	Rating
HelloTalk – Learn Languages	★★★★☆ (3,58)
Linguado – Language Learning Community	★★★☆☆ (2,58)

Discussion

RQ 1. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Interaction Applications

In the analysis of the interviews, it becomes apparent that the strengths are more than the weaknesses in utilizing interaction applications for effective Mobile-Assisted Language Learning MALL (RQ1). However, some of the strengths overlapped with the weaknesses, according to the interviewees. Four interviewees agreed that the first and foremost strength of interaction applications is communication with other people and practising colloquial speech. Finding native speakers for practising a target language can be accomplished through interaction applications, as they might not be in their region. According to the interviewees, languages that are not spoken near users' region are more appropriate for such apps, as well as languages using the Latin alphabet and languages with many speakers. Interviewees think that it would be difficult for beginners to learn a language from scratch on the interaction apps that would not use the Latin alphabet. On the other hand, communication with strangers is also seen as something negative due to danger of deception, focus on colloquial speech or other intentions apart from language learning and practice. Most of the female interviewees admittedly came across interlocutors that tried to use the apps for dating, especially from Arabian or Asian countries. One interviewee noted that the user interface of each application was something in which they found difficulty at first, but it was not a huge obstacle that could not be surpassed.

One interviewee considers interaction applications easily accessible, compatible, short-term and adjustable to your schedule through the use of mobiles. Only one interviewee mentioned that she was sick, while using the applications, but she admitted that she could still use them daily for a while. Another strength regards cultural influence which is important for the interviewees and in particular the feeling of community created by the 'Moments' page of HelloTalk. Two interviewees appreciated and commented on the extra material, because in this way users can cover some gaps in their learning. However, they think that due to requirements in advanced levels interaction applications could be more suitable for intermediate levels. Two interviewees were concerned about informal learning. They mainly consider it as a negative thing, but they recognized some of its value in terms of practicing a language. They would not be sure about the reliability of their interlocutors' answers. Two interviewees would feel more comfortable about communicating with a tutor through interaction applications for ensuring the learning outcomes, because even native speakers are not totally qualified to teach their language. In the material, the error found by one interviewee was denoting the second person singular instead of the second person plural, but it was found in different contexts of the basic 22 expressions of *Linguado* and may constitute a minor flaw.

Other strengths and weaknesses of interaction applications and learning applications in general were listed by other authors. Nushi and Makiababi [29] also highlighted respect to individual's privacy and demonstration of user's nationality, local time and location on HelloTalk that is also true about *Linguado*. There are options where users can hide such details on the apps. Elaish et al. [30] and Nushi and Makiababi [29] also raised concerns over reminders and cost (in our case limitations of premium versions). Interviewees did not put much emphasis on these. In terms of usability, Hang [6] and Elaish et al. [30] referred to inconvenience in viewing material, technical problems, lack of tactile feel of pages and difficulty of annotating among weaknesses. These were not a matter of concern to interviewees, because users have already been used to it as they use their smartphones for numerous daily activities [31]. Even though Al Ahdal et al. [5] think that conventional classrooms cannot be replaced by mobile applications, interviewees imply that interaction applications could possibly do that if they were tutor- or chatbot-driven.

RQ 2. HelloTalk or Linguado?

HelloTalk and *Linguado* are compared in order to determine which one has better characteristics based on different factors (RQ2); the ratings of the apps by the evaluator and the participants; the ratings and downloads of the apps on Google Play; the checklists by the evaluator and the participants; the participants' preferences; and the interviewees' preferences. To begin with, the

ratings of HelloTalk and Linguado by the evaluator are similar to those by the participants, which show a preference towards HelloTalk. However, the ratings of the apps on Google Play show that Linguado has a 4.9 rating and HelloTalk has a 3.9 rating which are controversial to the previous ratings by the evaluator and the participants. This might be due to previous versions of HelloTalk, as it emerged before Linguado.

In the analysis of the interviews, interviewees would generally use both apps but for practising colloquial speech and not learning on its own. They do not perceive them as the main source of their learning process, but rather as something extra. There is a clear preference over HelloTalk by two interviewees on account of its enriched content, the reliability of users, the 'Moments' page and reminders to keep using them. The enriched material and reminders of HelloTalk may account for the fact that interviewees admitted spending more time on this app than Linguado. This means that they were more motivated to use HelloTalk as it also appears on the checklist. Motivation is also confirmed by the fact that participants generally stuck to the suggested timeframe. The posts on the 'Moments' page immersed users into the everyday life of other users, like how they spend their Christmas Holidays, or what they are eating. L1 felt that this embraces users as part of the community of native speakers. Two others would use interaction applications again and implied that the selection of a specific app depends on the purpose of its use. HelloTalk would be selected if they wanted to progress, improve their vocabulary and use it systematically, whereas Linguado would be selected, if they wanted to communicate with speakers of other languages and preserve their current level of their target language. It should be mentioned that interviewees found interlocutors a lot harder on HelloTalk than Linguado, which is the exact opposite expectation due to the numbers of their user bases (10 million and 500 thousand downloads accordingly). This also accounts for evaluating the practice of writing skills and grammar on Linguado higher than HelloTalk by the participants. One interviewee would only use interaction applications again for practical reasons and did not prefer a specific app. To quote the latter:

L5: I would use interaction applications only if I wanted to learn a language, because I had to communicate with someone face-to-face, like if I wanted to travel to France; not for learning the language, for learning French. I would not use an interaction application in that case.

Participants further explained that HelloTalk was more interesting and seemed familiar, pleasurable and organized. One reason for not preferring Linguado by the participants is the indication of their location, probably because it was perceived as a threat for their safety. However, under some conditions a few interviewees and participants would use Linguado. They would use it, because it has a simpler interface contradicting the participants' checklist, they can communicate with native speakers of other languages and preserve their current level. However, participants felt more uncomfortable when they conversed with users on Linguado.

Generally, participants were positive about interaction applications as a multilingual experience and a way to practice the target language. Only a couple of participants objected to their use, because they did not like them or found them useful only for practical reasons, like facilitating communication when travelling. It is worth mentioning that the enriched content and extra material of HelloTalk might account for the fact that one participant and one interviewee mentioned Duolingo as an interaction application, even though Rosell-Aguilar [2] considers Duolingo a whole-language learning package and Botero et al. [20] mentions it as a language learning app with a focus on vocabulary. Some interviewees have heard of interaction applications, like Tandem, before using HelloTalk and Linguado, but no one has ever actually used one.

RQ 3. Theories and Views on Using Interaction Applications to Practice Languages

The theories that are associated with interaction applications (RQ3) may differ depending on the features of each app. Both of *HelloTalk* and *Linguado* are linked to constructivism, communicative

language teaching (CLT), collaborative or cooperative learning (CL), informal and lifelong learning and behaviourism (the audiolingual method). It should be noted that both of them offer drills with audio, regarding the audiolingual method, and HelloTalk also provides ice breakers as part of dialogues. However, the drills are part of the extra features and are not the most salient ones, which decreases the bond of interaction applications to the audiolingual method, even though they were well-appreciated by the interviewees. Both of the apps can be associated with the grammar-translation method. Moreover, only HelloTalk is related to suggestopedia.

Not all features were used by most of the interviewees, because they hesitated, did not want to make it very personal or found them pointless. In particular, translation was worthless for one interviewee, because they preferred the explanation in the target language. Their advanced level in the target language might be the reason for this preference. Translation for Koch [32] is also detrimental to fluency and the development of target language, which points to a need for negotiation for meaning. This indicates that, despite the translation feature, grammar-translation is not central and would not be applied to interaction applications according to the interviewees' views. Furthermore, one interviewee's comment about colloquial speech highlighted the need for informal learning and not only formal learning through lessons that are usually exam-oriented and focus on formal speech. The interviewee was used to formal speech and had difficulty in speaking with real native speakers. One participant even noted that talking to native speakers is the best way to learn a language and one interviewee supported that learners gain a different kind of knowledge when using interaction applications that they could not get through tutoring in their neighborhood. However, another one claimed that formal language learning from tutors would provide them with more enriched and targeted knowledge.

RQ 4. Possible Alterations for Improving Interaction Applications

Alterations were proposed or implied with regards to improvement of interaction applications (RQ4). Participants recommended adding more extra material to interaction applications, which points to a whole-learning language package though. These involved a better matching with other interlocutors based on common interests and target language, provision of reading instructions for target languages, more exercises in terms of grammar and vocabulary, collaboration in solving exercises, more lessons and content, such as podcasts. The introduction of lessons was also recommended for the use of mobile devices for learning English by Mospan [33] who added the need for updates with new content, for slower voice speed and for progress indicators, even though the latter is present in the form of points on HelloTalk. Interviewees did not propose anything about extra features, even though, features, such as transliteration or transcription that are not functioning properly, should be taken into account and be fixed by the designers. The fact that interviewees found the applications complete as they are may account for the low percentage of participants (25%) that proposed alterations to interaction application.

Interviewees that were positive towards the use of chatbots for language learning and three of them consider them more reliable, grammatically correct, convenient in terms of time or as another experience. Two of them, who would like to use robots with AI to learn a language, were asked, if robots would offer them the same experience as humans in terms of culture. L4 considers it feasible in a general framework, but L5 only if it was well-programmed. However, two of the interviewees disagreed about using robots with artificial intelligence, because they would feel uncomfortable and the experience would not be pleasurable and personalized. They think that cultural exchange would be hampered, as chatbots do not have an everyday life to talk about. L1 also highlighted that testing interaction applications using AI and real humans could shed light on the matter. To quote one interviewee:

L1: I believe that no matter how advanced a model of artificial intelligence can be, it could never replace human factor, as every human is different and has a different

character. You can choose who suits your personality more, while a robot, I think, could not customize the experience much, so that it could suit every personality of every human that uses it. It is somehow impersonal, I imagine, as I have not used such an app. But, I guess that it would be somehow impersonal. After all, a robot does not have anything to say about its everyday life or its interests so much so...

Moreover, interviewees were asked if model conversations would be of use to them as part of interaction apps. Three interviewees were positive about them for beginners, for jargon, for ideas or for saving time. Some of them were afraid that model conversations would limit their freedom of expression and thought that the existing ice breakers suffice. The alterations to interaction applications that were proposed by the interviewees regarded content and not the features of the applications. More specifically, they recommended inclusion of more content in terms of grammar and vocabulary, reading instructions for target languages, more lessons, extra material and exercises, just like the participants. On the other hand, some interviewees did not make any recommendations, because they found the interaction applications complete as they are or lacked ideas.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that free, texting-based interaction applications, particularly HelloTalk, effectively support intermediate foreign language learners in practicing conversational skills and cultural exchange, highlighting their pedagogical potential within MALL frameworks grounded in constructivist and communicative approaches. However, challenges such as user safety, technical limitations, and the informal nature of learning persist, limiting their broader application for comprehensive language acquisition. The findings imply that educators and developers should consider integrating advanced features like chatbots and model conversations to enhance usability and learning outcomes. Future research is recommended to expand evaluation to diverse application types, including tutor-driven and multimedia platforms, employ larger and longitudinal samples, and conduct comparative studies between MALL and CALL tools to better understand their relative efficacy and optimize language learning technologies.


LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by its focus on free, texting-based, non-tutor-driven applications available on Google Play, excluding other app types like audio/video or premium versions. The small sample size (N = 12) and short usage period restrict generalizability and longitudinal insights. Theoretical analysis was confined to two apps, limiting broader pedagogical perspectives. Self-reported data may also introduce bias. Future research should use larger samples, longer durations, and diverse application types to improve validity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

E.A. conceptualized the research framework, conducted the primary qualitative and quantitative analyses, and developed the theoretical foundation of the study. A.M.S. supervised the overall research process, contributed to the study design and methodology, and provided critical revisions to the manuscript. Both authors collaborated in drafting, revising, and finalizing the manuscript to ensure alignment with the research objectives and academic standards. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors used Grammarly during the preparation of this work to improve grammar. After utilizing the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the publication's content.

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